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THE SHILLUK'S BELIEF IN THE GOOD MEDICINE MEN.

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756 The Shilluks think of the witch doctors or medicine men as good, not because their lives are good, nor yet because their practice is good, but because they are looked upon as the channels through which occult powers may be transmitted to men. Their powers are for sale, and man in his need may go to them for help. The patient, who brings no fee, will not be treated, as they do no charity work. In the contest between good and evil, they seem to typify the good, as combating the powers of the evil medicine man.

[576] The people are not agreed as to the source whence the medicine man receives his power. Some maintain that the power comes from God, and others, that it is a heritage from the man's ancestors but the difference is not great, as those, who think of the power as coming from the ancestors, would also say that the first person of the line having the power received it from God. A medicine man is usually followed by one of his sons. The child to receive the power is designated by the father, and is usually either the oldest or youngest son, though a daughter may also be possessed of the power to work charms. The occult power may also descend on the descendants of a son or a daughter of a medicine man, who did not inherit that power, and the fact that the power of working charms comes to a person whose father was not a witch doctor may be explained as a proof of the return of the power of some forgotten ancestor.

756 When a man begins the practice of the art the first ceremony consists of a dedication. ~~George Somablon, W. 1918. "V. 1918. 1918"~~
[581] God, the power is yours. In order that I may save people, help me. Father, and my ancestor, the power was yours, so help me. The fee is yours, father, it will be given by me to you, and God". So the first fee is dedicated to God or to the source of the power, as a sort of payment to obtain the power. The first fee is usually a female, either a lamb, kid or calf, though occasionally a male

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may be thus dedicated. The animal so devoted must be young. Only the children of the medicine man may drink the milk of the consecrated animal, and its offspring may not be sold, though that is sometimes violated. If the devoted animal is a cow the calves are kept until the man has enough to get a wife, and from the children of that wife his successor is chosen. When such an animal dies its meat is eaten, but annually a sacrifice of either an ox or sheep is offered for it, and the tail, feet, and head of the sacrifice are cut off, and hung on a pole. The successor to the devoted animal is chosen from among its offspring. When the devoted animal is a male it is not permitted to die a natural death, as that would bring disaster on the village. When the first fee is a sheep, the medicine man may later substitute a cow for it, if he becomes prosperous. If the son inherits a devoted animal from his father it is not necessary for him to devote his first fee thus to the source of his power.

When a witch doctor takes a case he practically always offers a prayer, and while they are different yet the thought in each is the same. One such prayer was given thus: "God you are the one, who gives me the power. What power did I have before? I praise you, and may ancestor (Nikang), and Deng (who is worshipped by the Dinkas), and my father and mother. Is it not thus that you give me food?" The prayer may have many petitions, but practically the only reason given why it should be answered is, in order that the medicine man may get his food thereby.

The proof of the fact that the medicine man has the power he covets is found in the cures he makes. If a witch doctor fails in his first cases it is often taken as a proof that he does not have the power. However after a man has once established his reputation failure does not have such a serious effect on his practice.

Many of the medicine men have physical defects, and their children are usually sickly, and many of them are deformed. The natives say that this is caused by the fact that the shades of their victims bring a curse on the medicine man, and also on his family. The medicine man is usually well-to-do because of his exorbitant charges, and he can afford to, and does, take many wives, but he usually only has a few children.

756 Many of the people say that if a man refuses to consult the medicine men, God will be angry with that person, and leave him to get along without help, which means that he will be cut off from all supernatural aid.

[484] Many of the witch doctors are specialists, while others undertake
[751] to work charms for many different things. In practically every thing undertaken the witch doctor is consulted. If a man is going on a journey he lets the medicine man work over him to give him safety from dangers seen and unseen. Very frequently before a
[224] hunt the witch doctor assures them of success in the chase, and in the hunting of dangerous animals he ties the quarry so that it will not be able to injure the hunters. A thief who hopes to steal a cow often goes to a witch doctor, and has a charm wrought over him so that the people of the village will not be aroused by any
[726] sound he may make. The witch doctor gives victory when the people are going out to war. He also detects the men, who are to be killed in the fight, and he works a charm over them, which causes the impending death to be averted. The power to kill by magic resides in the witch doctor, and many other things are done by them. Diseases are supposed to yield to their charms. The
[752] power to cure snake bites, and to heal a burn by spitting on it
[755] are special powers belonging to only a few. Many are able to give a fetish, which protects its owner.

The witch doctor will not treat himself when ill, and he does not treat the members of his own family. He goes to some other witch doctor to be helped.

756 The fetish plays a very large part in the work of a witch doctor.
789 He gives the little charms for many different purposes. They are supposed to give protection on a journey, to insure success in courtship, to protect from wild animals, to insure a favourable judgment, to protect cattle in crossing a river, and many other powers are ascribed to them. However a fetish is only effective for the one purpose for which it was obtained.

756 One medicine man, when asked how he cured a patient, said: "I first collect a small fee, and then I work over the patient. When the patient recovers I return and collect a large fee".

The dismissal of a patient is attended with some ceremony. The patient and witch doctor make a trip to the river in the evening.

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The man, who had been sick leans upon his staff as he walks. They then return to the house of the patient in the same way, and usually a fee is given the medicine man, and he says: "I have mine now, you will not be sick again". The patient then discards his staff, and early the next morning he goes to work again. 756

The witch doctor claims the power to kill a person by casting a charm on him, but for such a service he exacts a very heavy fee, as the risk to the witch doctor is considerable. The spirit of the departed is liable to return, and make war on the medicine man, and in the end kill him. It is necessary for the medicine man to outwit the spirit of the departed and that is accomplished by killing a chicken. The dead chicken is placed in an earthen vessel, and it is buried in the road with the bottom of the vessel up, and protruding out of the ground. This device brings protection in two ways. First every person passing the vessel is liable to carry away a bit of the curse, and in the second place the chicken has a spirit, which is greatly displeased at being killed, and it immediately decides that it is due to the departed that death was inflicted on it, and so it makes war on the spirit of the departed, and the poor shade gets so busy defending himself against the shade of the chicken that it has no opportunity to return to inflict punishment on the medicine man. Every medicine man, who passes the vessel taps it with his club. He thinks that in that way some of the power of the medicine man who put the vessel in the road will be given to him. After the death of the victim the medicine man also demands a sheep from his client, so that he can sacrifice it to help to appease the spirit of the departed. 775
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When a village is going into a fight it is very convenient to know before, who will be killed. They have at least two ways of learning this. By one method two spears are stuck in the earth. They are connected at the top by a string, and another string passes between them at the bottom. All the fighting men bearing their weapons, must pass between the spears, and if a man or his weapons touch either the spears or the string he will be killed in the fight. The second method is by the gourd of God. Many of the more successful witch doctors have a gourd of God. It is a gourd with a handle upon which is an iron band. The gourd is greased, and in it is put some grain. When the gourd is shaken 756
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726 the grain rattles, and that is God talking. The gourd is kept in
 756 the medicine man's house, and an outsider is not permitted to
 787 approach it. A small space is mudded in front of the gourd, and
 this a little court is formed in front of it, and a mat is frequently
 placed in front of the gourd to give it greater privacy. When a
 fight is imminent the gourd of God is brought out, and each of the
 warriors casts his spoon on the gourd. For spoons they use mussel
 shells. When a spoon breaks it is a sign that the owner will be
 killed in the fight. When a bit is chipped from the spoon it is a
 sign that the owner will be wounded in the fight. When all the
 [75] people have been tested the men who are indicated as liable to
 death are called, and they are told to bring a heavy fee, and the
 witch doctor goes through a form to avert the evil that is impending.

756 The gourd is used for other purposes as well. When a man
 789 wishes to consult the gourd of God he is conducted into the house
 by the owner of the gourd, and the first thing the suppliant does
 is to cast the gift for God on the ground, which belongs to the
 owner of the gourd. He then kneels before the altar, and makes
 known the reason for his coming. The medicine man declares that
 is easy, and that it is already accomplished, and the gourd is
 rattled at his back, and also in front of him, and is then passed
 around his head in circles.

Recourse may also be had to the gourd of God when a man is
 going on a journey. After making his approach to the gourd, and
 stating his needs the medicine man takes two spoons. One which
 is dirty represents the suppliant, the other which is clean represents
 his enemy either known or unknown. The clean spoon is then put
 in water, so that the anger of the enemy will be cooled, and his
 thoughts will not be so bitter. Knotted grass is then put in the
 water with the clean spoon. That is a gag which binds the mouth
 of the enemy so that he can not speak against the suppliant. The
 gourd is then rolled across the road on which the traveller expects
 to start. The gourd is then rattled near his head, back and chest.
 The man then crouches in the house looking out toward the road
 on which he expects to travel. The medicine man then leaps over
 him, and then turns, and leaps over him the other way, and that
 is repeated. He is then advised to start on his journey, and is
 assured that nothing will injure. He starts, and the witch doctor

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follows for a little distance rattling the gourd. The spoon representing the traveller remains with the medicine man, but is not in the water. 756 789

In sickness the outcome may be foretold by the gourd. Spoons representing different people are thrown on the gourd. If the spoon for the patient rebounds, and falls on the spoon for God it is a good omen as he will recover. The same test is made to determine the outcome of a fight. If the spoon of the suppliant falls on the spoon of the enemy, it is a sign that the adversary will be overcome. 755 756 787

On payment of a cow a medicine man will make a small cow rope, which is to be worn on the arm. The rope is supposed to tie the hands of all enemies, by a magical bond.

The medicine man makes a little circlet of grass to put on the head of a person. It is made like the little circlet they wear when carrying a load on their heads to protect their heads. The witch doctor then spits on the circlet, and gives it to the man for whom it was made. He is told to guard it well for in case it is lost he will die, but while he has it he will always have good fortune. He sometimes pays as much as a cow for the bit of grass. 756 777 789 [462]

When the evil eye has been cast on a man and "his spirit has left him", the medicine man undertakes to restore his spirit. One way to do that is to take a certain kind of grass, and rub it on the chest of the patient. He then spits on his hands, and rolls the grass in his hands. The grass is then dipped in water, and the water is sprinkled on the patient. The ashes from the dung of a medicine man's cow may also be rubbed on his chest. 755 756

Unlike the evil medicine men, who work almost entirely at night, the good medicine men may work in the daylight, though even they work frequently at night, but their favourite time seems to be just before sunrise, and just after sunset. Frequently when a fight is imminent, and the men are sleeping together so as to be ready for a night attack, the medicine man will leap up and shout that power has come on him, and he insists that the people get up, and permit him to work over them. 756

The medicine man strives to be spectacular in his work, and often he tries to visualize the fate of his victims. For example,

756 when he is asked to kill a man he may take a sheep, and cleave its head with an axe, and he declares that in the same manner his power has broken the head of the man against whom the charm was worked. They try to impress the people with a sense of the mysterious, and very frequently they have strings stretched in their houses to impress the people who seek their services.

[179] The witch doctors exert a powerful influence over the Shilluks.
[185] Their influence is always against innovation, and they seek to hold the old order of things. While a medicine man who is just beginning his practice must be successful to gain the confidence of the people, yet when he once has their confidence he can readily explain away all his failures.

Very few Shilluks will admit that they believe in the power of the medicine man, but in spite of their denials they seek him constantly, and their whole manner of life is influenced by the witch doctor. A few are beginning to question the whole system. Once a gourd of God broke when some warriors were being tested before a fight. The grain that had been in it was spilled on the ground. One man pointed to the grain, and said: "Is that God"? Apparently he was the only one of the party, who connected the noise made by the gourd with the grain that was in the gourd.

So long as the Shilluks are dominated by the medicine men, they will make very slight advancement in their mode of thought and their manner of living.